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Impressions of Anglo-Indian Society in R. Kipling's Early Creative Art

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Abstract. This study concentrates on the analysis of early works by Rudyard Kipling who was born into the family of English colonists to India, thus becoming a representative of the newly formed Anglo-Indian society. The writer's sketch *Anglo-Indian Society* (1887) and his collection of short stories *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888) depict the characteristic features of Anglo-Indians' worldview and lifestyle, which are revealed and analyzed by the author of the article. Special attention is paid to biographical factors influencing the author's choice of Anglo-Indian topic at the beginning of his writing career. The researcher concludes that Kipling presents in his works an outline of Anglo-Indian society which emerged from the writer's observations of Anglo-Indians' lives during his work as a reporter. Striving for credibility in consideration of advantages and shortcomings of Anglo-Indian worldview and lifestyle, the author tries to occupy the position of the unconcerned observer, being capable of assessing the situation with fresh mind. Kipling disguises himself under the image of the hero-narrator, being either a tourist traveler from abroad, or a reporter, accustomed to collecting factual material for the local paper, in such a way receiving an opportunity to speak ironically and sometimes even sarcastically about certain models of behavior, accepted by Anglo-Indians.

INTRODUCTION

After the discovery of India the European market was flooded with a great number of unusual, exotic goods which immediately got high praise in the European society. The idea of «fabulously rich India» with countless treasures attracted an increasing number of energetic and enterprising merchants and seamen, who organized numerous expeditions to the mysterious country «in search of adventure, fame and profit» [1; 2]. As it is known, the fight of leading European countries for the spheres of influence on Indian territories resulted in the victory of the British Empire, establishing its dominance over the whole territory of India (1858-1947).

India became «the pearl of the British crown» [4]. Its wealth contributed greatly to the development of industry, as well as to the improvement of economic health of the mother country. However, the Indians considered the British to be invaders from a distant country with a different way of life, traditions, habits and a system of values. The British, in their turn, regarded the natives with contempt as the representatives of a «lower social class», thus enhancing mutual hatred [4; 12].

The relations of two communities began to improve only in the 1870's. The Indians got used to new types of economic relations. Moreover, the colonists began to build hospitals and educational institutions, as well as organised a regular postal service [2]. The British themselves, having immigrated to India, received a unique experience of immersion into exotic Indian culture, customs and beliefs, which resulted in the formation of a new world perception and self-consciousness, different from the traditional British mentality and becoming typical for the representatives of a newly formed Anglo-Indian society.

One of the most famous Anglo-Indians was Rudyard Kipling. The future writer, born in Bombay in 1865, spent in Indian environment the first five years of his life, and then was sent to study in the mother country, only returning to India in 1882.

According to Kipling's autobiographical work «Something of myself» (1937), the experience of returning to India appeared to be hard for a 16-year old youngster who got used to living in the cultivated and civilized Victorian society where art and literature were the most

popular interests and topics of discussion. As Kipling found out, the sophisticated small talk in literary English contrasted greatly with «vernacular sentences» of Indian English, the sense of which the youngster «knew not» anymore – such was a usual phenomenon happening to many Indian-born Englishmen, who had received education in Great Britain [8].

Kipling's unique experience of accepting the «alien» (English) environment as the «own» in his childhood and returning to the original (Anglo-Indian) environment as an adult, along with psychological difficulties, accompanying the process of changing concepts of the «own» and the «alien», could be the reasons of the writer's special attention to Anglo-Indians' mentality. Unsurprisingly, Kipling dedicated one of his first works to the detailed description of Anglo-Indian lifestyle (*Anglo-Indian Society*, 1887) and then made an attempt to give a broad outline of Anglo-Indians' psychological types, manners of behavior, social and moral norms in a series of his short stories *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888).

DISCUSSION

Kipling's first impressions of India, its native population and Anglo-Indians are strongly connected with his place of birth – Bombay, the city of «strong light and darkness» [8]. The childish memories of nanny's «stories and Indian nursery songs all unforgotten», evenings in a warm family circle, morning walks to the Bombay's market in search of «golden and purple fruits» [8], observations of friends' lives in adult age – all these impressions found their reflection in the writer's early works.

One of them became a sketch *Anglo-Indian Society*, which was conventionalized to resemble a letter of an Englishman, travelling about India. At first being completely ignorant of this strange and exotic country, the narrator feels genuine surprise at discovering a completely new image of the Anglo-Indian which is reflected at the beginning of the letter: «You believe that Anglo-Indians are domineering and arrogant in their habits...I looked out keenly for anything of the kind among my hosts, especially in regard to their servants...So far as I was able to judge, my first notions were altogether wrong» [5]. In fact, «the relations between master and servant are...closer...than with us in England» [5]. It seems that these lines disclose Kipling's personal experience of observing the relations of English masters to their servants. The hostess of a «dark» «small house, smelling of aridity and emptiness», where the writer lived during his studies, beat the girl-servant and threatened retaliation to her because she had stolen some food due to «severe rationing» [8].

Nevertheless, young Kipling was soon aware that the English culture wasn't limited to the set of strict moral norms and rules of behavior. Visiting museums and monuments in Oxford and London, watching a famous painter Edward Burne-Jones (Kipling's uncle) and his friends at work helped the child to get acquainted with the British historical and cultural heritage, as well as to plunge into the unique and wonderful world of Pre-Raphaelites who «either wrote or painted pictures or...ornamented tiles» [8].

No wonder that the most part of Kipling's sketch is filled with criticism of Anglo-Indians' worldview and lifestyle. The narrator finds out that «there is no society in India as we understand the word», as each Anglo-Indian «has a hard day's work to do, and has very little inclination to talk or to do anything but sleep at the end of it», therefore «no one talks lightly and amusingly as in England. Every one works and talks and thinks about his work», and people «are enthusiastic enough about their work — always their work» [5]. Although Anglo-Indians appeared to be more hospitable and kind-hearted than the citizens of metropolis, they «don't seem to realize any of the beauties of life — perhaps they haven't time. It's a queer country» [5].

Plain life in which there are no books, no pictures», «amusements are very forlorn affairs, and there never seems to be any 'go'», great hospitality, absence of fantasy and humour, as well as of interest to historical and cultural values – all these factors were also distinguished by Kipling's contemporary Oscar Wilde. While lecturing in America in 1882-1883, the future apologist of aestheticism defined the main features of the «new» utilitarian worldview which had already become characteristic of the American society. As Wilde claims in his *Impressions of America*, the

Americans «are entirely given to business», pragmatism is their idol and «everybody seems in a hurry to catch a train» in their mutual desire to get the maximum material benefit from every moment of life [14]. According to O. M. Valova, Wilde as an aesthete and a proponent of returning of beauty to everyday life always shows ironic attitude towards the Americans who are unaware of spiritual and cultural values [13, p. 368].

It seems that the «new» worldview and lifestyle were formed in Anglo- Indian society due to the same reasons as in American one – as a result of breaking bonds with historical roots, along with historical and cultural traditions of the mother country, as well as of impact of a new uncivilized land, which was completely alien to the European mind.

Kipling who admired British and European cultural heritage was frustrated to discover the absence of cultural events in Anglo-Indian life – «books, plays, pictures, and amusements, outside what games the cold weather allowed, there were none» [8]. Unsurprisingly, the period of work as a reporter for Punjab and Allahabad newspapers since 1882 till 1889 turned out to be «seven year's hard» for the writer. As Kipling lamented, he had to live «from the modern point of view...the life...not fit for a dog», to work 10-15 hours per day, and «death was always our near companion» because of constant typhoid epidemics [8]. Therefore, a young reporter often prepared a new material for the newspaper, feeling «the taste of fever» in his mouth, and «the buzz of quinine» in his ears, with «the temper frayed by heat to breaking point but for sanity's sake held back from the break» [8].

However, as some researchers point out, the reporting work became «an excellent school for the unfledged writer», as in the process of preparing the material about horse-racers and receptions organized by high-ranking officials, construction of mines and factories Kipling got a number of chances of closer acquaintance with the structure of Anglo-Indian society, the life of English colonists and Indians, the relations between Anglo-Indians and the natives, so that he could include his observations into his early fiction [10, p. 153].

Kipling's first works appeared in 1885 in *Civil and Military Gazette* – they were published along with articles prepared by the author. As Kipling confessed, his stories could be placed on the newspaper pages only «when...padding was needed» [8]. However, these small stories, further collected into the volume *Plain Tales from the Hills*, together with *Departmental Ditties* (1886), made the writer famous not only in Punjab, but also in Calcutta and Bengali.

In the author's opinion, the stories «were well received», as they «dealt with things known and suffered by many people» [8]. Indeed, while working as a reporter, Kipling not only got acquainted with all types of representatives of Anglo-Indian society, but also was often involved into «bare horrors» of stories of private life. The writer concludes that Anglo-Indian society is mostly formed by «picked men at their definite work – Civilians, Army, Education, Canals, Forestry, Engineering, Irrigation, Railways, Doctors, and Lawyers» [8]. The representatives of these professions form the system of characters in *Plain Tales from the Hills*.

The plot of each story is based on the episode of Anglo-Indians' lives, revealing the typical features of their mentality and peculiarities of their attitude to the exotic environment, unusual and often hostile to a civilized European, as well as to indigenous population, representing a completely different race with its own cultural and spiritual values. As Kipling states, the Indians are much more careless than the British workers, they make «everything...raw, unfinished, misjointed, slack and wrongly built», and the English masters describe their work as «kutchra — which means everything is just as an English workman would not turn it out» [5]. Therefore, in Anglo-Indian houses «doors don't come up properly to the jambs; windows are never straight; there is no finish in the roofs. Floors and plinths are badly put down...», «there is no correct rabbeting, mortising...or joinery of any sort in the land...» [5].

Kutchra becomes a surprising phenomenon for English characters of Kipling's stories. Thus, the young hero of *Thrown Away* who got education in the mother country is surprised to find out that in India «bad work does not matter, because other men do worse, and incompetents hang on longer...than anywhere else» [9]. However, in *Miss Youghal's Sais* kutchra serves as one of the factors of creation of comic situation. The main character – the English policeman, having been

refused to marry a girl he loved, disguises as a *sais* (a servant) and gets a job with the girl's parents. Strickland, trying to do everything for his beloved, soon becomes «a paragon among *saises* – the man who was never too busy to get up in the morning and pick flowers for the breakfast-table, and who blacked...the hoofs of his horse like a London coachman!» [7].

Kipling suggests that the reason of *kutchas*, i.e. Indians' incapability of quick and high-quality work, as the English do, consists in climatic differences of two countries. As «much of real Indian life goes on in the hot-weather nights» (because during the day the heat is unbearable), «the native staff of the offices are not much use next morning» [8]. Strickland also does his surveillances at night in order to obtain better results from his «dabbling in unsavory places no respectable man would think of exploring» [7]. Even Kipling himself used to wander through the night city «for the sheer sake of looking», breathing hookah-fumes, jasmine-flowers, and sandalwood [8].

The peculiarities of Indian climate with a harsh change of suffocating heat, storms and downpours become the factors which influence the heroes' behavior and the course of events in Kipling's short stories. Thus, in *False Dawn* the dust-storm helps to accelerate the development of action and leads the characters to the outcome. As the heroes suddenly find themselves in the middle of «roaring, whirling darkness», so that «you could not see your hand before your face», the gentleman confused his beloved one with her sister and proposed to the wrong lady [6].

The offended girl tries to escape from the company, «flickering» «across...desolate plain...on the gray horse»: «she wheeled round and set off for the river through beds of burnt down jungle-grass, bad even to ride a pig over» [6]. This episode reveals the lady's high level of mastery in horse-riding, which the girls in metropolis didn't possess. In fact, in Victorian society «riding a horse in public was not advised until a young lady had acquired a degree of expertise that would not cause her and her family embarrassment» [3]. It was considered «a man's duty to help a lady to mount her horse», as her skirts were large enough due to «Victorian horror of viewing a female foot or leg» [3]. However, high-speed horse-riding without a man's help is a quite ordinary event for an Anglo-Indian girl who appears to be as skillful in it as men. As the narrator confesses, he «was forced to ride after her in earnest» after «she lashed her horse» and «galloped away» [6]. According to the author, excellent horse-riding skills were vitally important for Anglo-Indians as all their transport was «limited to horses and such railways as existed» [8]. Therefore, «they all ride — down to the children. They have no notion of walking; but as a class they ride beautifully» [5].

Kipling's sketch touches upon one more characteristic trait of Anglo-Indian mentality: «they are more than American in their curious belittling of everything». As the writer declares, «nothing seems to impress the Anglo-Indians except their work», so «I don't think you could startle an Anglo-Indian under any circumstances» [5]. In *Thrown Away* India is defined as «a place beyond all others where one must not take things too seriously», as «too much work and too much energy kill a man just as effectively as too much assorted vice or too much drink» [9]. In this country a person with serious illness is said to be «sick» [5], and sickness «does not matter, because it's all in the day's work, and if you die another man takes over your place and your office in the eight hours between death and burial» [9]. The tragic suicide of the Boy (a hero of the story), in the author's opinion, was a result of his serious attitude to failures and losses, though «the memory of his performances would wither away in one hot weather, and the shroff would help him to tide over the money troubles» [9]. However, the Boy decides not to escape «to some place where amusement is amusement and a reputation worth the having», but to pay with his death for «indelible shame» and «criminal folly» (as it seems to him) [9]. The Boy's seriousness is contrasted with life philosophy of the representatives of «a slack, *kutchas* country» where «nothing matters» [9]. As the author ironically remarks, the Anglo-Indian society remembered about the hero's death «as long as was necessary» and «every one forgot about The Boy before a fortnight was over» [9].

CONCLUSION

Using the images of the tourist from Great Britain and of ironic reporter, doing his usual job of highlighting current events, Kipling gets the opportunity to separate himself from the environment to which he actually belonged and to depict the main features of Anglo-Indian

worldview and lifestyle from the standpoint of unconcerned observer. The writer seems to have followed the plan of his hero Strickland to write a book on the study of the lowest social classes in India. However, unlike this character, the author strives for presenting a complete outline of social and psychological types of Anglo-Indians. Starting with the sketch, the writer expands his plan into a set of short stories, embodying the results of his own social study of the main peculiarities of the newly-formed Anglo-Indian society, which firstly appears to be a kutchra environment, threatening to ruin all cultivated and civilized new-comers, but suddenly it transforms into a place where the person's character is checked for strength and heroism, where the existence of true love and high feelings becomes possible.

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